

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY FOR COLOMBIA:
A POTENTIAL END TO THE CURRENT CRISIS**

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ABSTRACT

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Some writers and analysts have considered erroneously that Colombia is a state that has lost its capacity to govern and that the country is mostly under control of illegal organizations such as drug traffickers, insurgents groups or self-defense forces. This paper discusses the historical context and the current Colombian situation, and explains the efforts that the government, the people and the armed forces have undertaken to resolve the problem of violence. The paper also examines the results of Plan Colombia as a partnership between the US and Colombia, and explores the military strategy applied by the Colombian Armed Forces that is reducing significantly the power of criminal organizations that have challenged Colombian democracy. A new light of hope illuminates the hearts of the Colombian people based on the outcomes of the strategy developed. The continuity of this strategy will determine the future of the nation.

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PREFACE

To develop this work I have taken as a theoretical framework the Clausewitzian concept of the “Remarkable Trinity”, which assisted me as a useful reference to approach this question. The Colombian case is a good example of how this concept has not been considered, and incorrect strategies were applied in this country during the past decades. This paper explains the role played in Colombia by each one of the actors of the trinity: the people, the armed forces, and the government. Likewise, it explains how a new strategy has taken into account the balance among these actors and has been applied by the current Colombian Administration, obtaining outstanding results thus far in a short period of time. The Colombian experience during the last eighteen months not only has brought a new hope for a solution to the most complex conflict in the Americas, but also demonstrates that Clausewitz’s ideas still are appropriate references today for strategists worldwide.

In his book *On War*, Clausewitz refers that in war as a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make it a remarkable trinity. This trinity is composed of: 1) violence, hatred and enmity, that mainly concerns the people; 2) the play of chance and probability, that concerns the commander and his army; and 3) its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, that concerns the government.¹

The theory of the trinity considers clearly three elements: emotion, chance and rational policy. Furthermore, it connects each element with its respective human actors: the people, the army, and the government. In other words, taking together both elements and actors, it means that in war, whether limited or total, it is necessary to maintain equilibrium between them. Thus, the feelings of the population, the professional qualities of the army, and the policy of the government must be articulated in a well-balanced strategy that allows the nation to achieve its national security objectives.

Viewed from another perspective, the elements of the Clausewitzian trinity are implicit within the elements of national power, except for economic. The informational or social element of power is directed to impact the feelings of the people. The military refers to the potential of the armed forces. The diplomatic or political element considers the power of the government. Therefore, if strategy is defined as a calculated relationship among ends, ways, and means, in any war situation a successful strategy has to integrate efficiently the elements of national power (military, diplomatic, economic and informational), that encompasses the elements of the trinity.

The “Remarkable Trinity” is not an isolated concept. It needs to be related in the whole spectrum of war. If war is an instrument of policy, then policy ought to address a wise strategy that considers the best use of means and ways to achieve the strategic ends of the nation. In this context, the people, the army and the government in a synchronized effort must play an equally significant part by balancing human emotions, military creativity and rational policy. Disregarding these factors or ignoring their links will destabilize any state's war endeavor.

The Colombian experience confirms this theory. A country facing a security threat with the people, government and the army moving in different directions, facilitates gains by its enemy, and puts in serious risk its existence as democratic nation. The leadership of the government with a comprehensible strategy, supported by the population and the talent of military forces, achieved outstanding results in less than two years. It is too early to predict that the new Colombian strategy is the panacea to this complex crisis. However, Colombia is

sensing the “light at the end of tunnel”. Succeeding will require continuity in the long term, a great deal of patience, and the solution of deeply rooted political, social and economic causes that underlie this conflict.

While the situation in Colombia remains unsolved, the words of the Prussian soldier remain timely as a prophecy: “A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless”.

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“AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY FOR COLOMBIA: A POTENTIAL END TO THE CURRENT CRISIS”

“The country only wants the destruction of terrorism, the control of coexistence and the victory of democracy. We must listen to this resounding voice of opinion, take it as an order and honor it”.

—President Alvaro Uribe’s speech to the military, Bogotá, December 2003.

The Colombian conflict has motivated hundreds of researches, analysis, and studies attempting to explain its complexities by applying the knowledge of diverse branches of thinking or through the prism of different ideological perspectives. It has attracted the attention of the international community due to its unique characteristics, and the fact that it continues as the primary unresolved insurgency in the Western Hemisphere. Despite the post-Cold War optimism that facilitated the demobilization of most insurgent groups, the Colombian conflict showed an opposite pattern that witnessed the increasing intensity of the struggle. New ways to fight, increasing illegal organizations, and sophisticated sources of financing brought about a complex scenario that made it much more difficult to achieve a feasible solution to the conflict.

This paper doesn’t intend to explain either the Colombian problem or its appropriate solution. I would like to portray a realistic image, describing the efforts that my country has undertaken to find a reasonable exit to the labyrinth of violence and uncertainty that unlawful groups have created to satisfy their illegitimate purposes. Also, I would like to clarify with these ideas that Colombia is not a *failing* or *failed state* as some respectable authors have suggested. Havoc and chaos have been the ideal goals of terrorists groups, but these aren’t adequate words to describe the Colombian panorama. Denying the realities of the problem is as illogical as exaggerating its magnitude. After decades of resisting all kinds of cruelty and pain, one truth has been demonstrated: the character of the Colombian people is above the capacity of its enemies to destroy.

ROOTS OF THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT

In Colombia, since the bloody period known as *La Violencia*², communist-oriented guerrilla groups have been active since the mid-1960s. The largest group, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), was established in 1964. The second largest group, the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN), was established in 1966. These groups expanded slowly until the 1980s, applying the tactics and techniques of guerrilla warfare.

Since the 1980s, the conflict has added two new phenomena: the emergence of illegal organizations known as self-defense groups, or paramilitaries³, and the collaboration of

guerrillas and paramilitaries with drug cartels. In several geographic areas, both guerrillas and self-defense groups gradually eliminated and displaced drug traffickers, obtaining through the illegal drug trade the resources they needed to intensify their struggle.

In the 1990's, terrorism entered this violent scenario and gave the illegal groups a psychological weapon to intimidate the people with a menu of atrocities: kidnapping, extortion, assassination, massacres, bombings, attacks on towns, blowing up oil pipelines and energy towers, etc., trying to impose control by terror in some regions.⁴ By 2002, guerrillas increased their numbers to nearly 20,000 members and self-defense forces to 12,000. The impact of this conflict has seriously affected the security in the country, limiting the authority of the government to control some portions of Colombian territory, and eroding its economy and society.

The problem of violence and security in Colombia increased because the state lacked leadership to integrate a strategy that addressed the political, economic, military, and social dynamics of the conflict. Despite several attempts to resolve the situation, none was able to effectively synchronize the capacity of government, people and the armed forces in a unified effort to deal with this threat. However, this situation changed in 2002, when a strategy was developed that finally integrated them.

Since the mid 1960's, when the insurgency problem emerged in Colombia, the people, the government and the military have taken different approaches. The following paragraphs detail the main characteristics of each's historical role in the conflict.

THE PEOPLE

The attitude of the Colombian people can be divided into three periods: Indifference, Coexistence and Rejection. These periods have been determined according to the level of impact by illegal groups on the civilian population.

Indifference was the attitude during the 1960's and 1970's, when guerrilla groups were emerging and expanding, as their actions were generally concentrated in isolated regions of the national territory. The framework of the Cold War helped lead the people to perceive communist groups as messianic organizations, particularly among some sectors of the poor, students and leftist parties. In the urban areas, the problem was seen as a peripheral matter, and people acted as would a neutral spectator watching a football game. The results of the struggle were remote from their interests; only peasants in the countryside were directly affected by the violent situation.

Coexistence came in the 1980's; at that time guerrillas groups achieved considerable ability to disrupt the country. Their illegal actions approached the main cities, far beyond the

peasant population. Then, farmers, ranchers, businessmen, industrialists and landowners became targets of guerrillas, who asked them for economical support and that they not denounce the guerrillas to the authorities for their criminal activities. To combat the situation, most of the affected people tried to obtain the guerrillas' consent by paying extortion money, ransoms, and supporting them with logistical activities. Silence with the authorities on guerrilla movements was an extra "charge". Some people decided to confront the problem by creating and supporting self-defense groups to counter the growing threat.

Rejection started in the 1990's when indiscriminate terrorist actions spread throughout Colombia and the civilian population was the focus of the attacks. This environment convinced the people that guerrillas posed a significant threat. The bitter reality quickly showed: "Guerrillas were nothing but organized criminals, murderers, drug traffickers, kidnappers, extortionists and power hungry demagogues deserving no political legitimacy".⁵ The feelings of civil society changed from disinterest to a decisive desire to support an initiative that confronted this threat once and for all.



In 2002, the FARC ("Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia"), the biggest narcoterrorist group in Colombia, achieved its maximum strength with 7 "bloques", divided into 66 "fronts", and had almost 16,500 members. Its terrorist actions affected the entire Colombian territory.

FIGURE 1. FARC ORGANIZATION

During the periods mentioned, cohesion has been absent in the attitude of the Colombian people, because the burden of the problem has been unequally divided between the poor and

the upper classes. Urban middle and upper classes want to solve the problem “with other’s blood” (the poor class, especially peasants in the countryside). Specific laws have been tailored to shelter young people of the upper classes from participating in combat units or to accomplish military service. This situation has contributed to civilian leaders remaining aloof from military service. On the other hand, the main body of the Colombian diaspora consists of people who can afford to travel abroad; hence, the poor remain at the center of the storm.

THE MILITARY

The military forces have had the most critical role in this process, due to the tendency in Colombia to use the army as the first resort, rather than the last. This tendency has created a “militarizing spirit” within Colombian civilian leaders and its society. When the violent struggle between the two political parties during *La Violencia* period challenged national peace, a military coup was the best solution for some political leaders. The military government (1953-1958) initially enjoyed considerable popular support. In 1957, leaders of Liberal and Conservative Parties created The National Front to govern jointly, alternating the presidency every four years, after 1958.

As a result of military government, political leaders maintained a sense of distrust of the military and a distant relationship prevailed for a long time. In spite of the fact that Colombian military forces have maintained a commitment to respect democratic institutions, the specter of a coup d’état was a barrier that impeded the design of national strategies to confront insurgent problems. The unwritten rule of no intrusion of the military into political affairs was complemented by the lack of interest and knowledge of civilian leaders regarding military issues.

Civilian authorities considered insurgency as a problem of public order. The responsibility was left to the military, which had to deal with the issue without a coordinated national security policy. Consequently, military operations were at the core of the strategy, and there were few initiatives to carry out solutions other than military⁶, based on a sense of distrust of political leaders toward the armed forces and the lack of leadership to generate popular support.

Without a clear strategy, the intensity of conflict grew and the army was lured into the scheme of a protracted popular war, the type of warfare suited to guerrillas. With this panorama the “Vietnam Syndrome” infected the troops: tactical results prevailed over strategic objectives; patrols and raids were conducted instead of coordinated operations at strategic level; maintenance of public order prevailed instead of decisive war; the number of casualties measured unit success. For the draftees, all of these aspects created the mentality that to come

back home alive was the principal objective. This resulted in a deterioration of military prestige as well as a loss in credibility for the Colombian Government.

The lessons learned brought into military institutions a self-instituted series of reforms and modernization in the late 1990's. Today, the results on the battlefield have reduced the capacity of terrorist groups while gaining the confidence of the population in the military. However, the cost of this conflict has been very high; thousands have given their lives to bring hope to future generations of Colombians.

THE GOVERNMENT

As a long-standing traditional democratic system, the Colombian National Government has executive, legislative and judicial branches. The president acts as chief of state, head of government, supreme administrative authority, and supreme commander of the Armed Forces of the Republic. The president is elected for a four-year term and cannot be re-elected.

The lack of continuity in government policies has been the main obstacle to implementing long-term strategies. Every four years a new Colombian Government has established its own plan, normally disregarding or distancing itself from the previous administration. During presidential campaigns, some political platforms are based mainly on criticizing the outgoing government. This situation is common when opposite parties have alternated in power, or when internal divisions appeared within the president's party. In contrast to the government, guerrilla groups maintain their leaders, prosecute a long-term strategy, and have a clear objective: to reach and reduce the state's power. The guerrillas have taken advantage of these circumstances successfully, and have expanded their capabilities accordingly.

The government has used different mechanisms to solve the conflict: state-of-siege, coercion, cease-fire, a new Constitution, amnesty, the peace process, and mediation. As a result, the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) and several smaller guerrilla groups were successfully incorporated into civil society during the late 1980's and 1990's. The largest and most violent guerrillas groups, the FARC and the ELN, have refused political proposals. Illegal self-defense groups have not received political treatment. However, in the spring of 2003 the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) initiated negotiations with the government.

The unsolved situation raised in the hearts and minds of Colombians a perception of a leadership vacuum. Without faith in the government, people neglected to support political initiatives. The credibility of political institutions evaporated, thus undermining the state's structure and capacity to govern effectively.

COLOMBIA'S NEW STRATEGY

In August 2002, Alvaro Uribe was sworn in as President of Colombia, after he won the presidency with overwhelming support of the population. The key to popular enthusiasm was his promise to implement a plan named "Democratic Security and Defense Policy". This plan responds to the repressed desires of the population and fits clearly within the strategy proposed by the Colombian Armed Forces in previous administrations. The plan is a political mechanism designed to protect and guarantee the rights of Colombians, and to neutralize the threat of terrorism against the Colombian people.⁷

The basic objectives of this policy are:

- Consolidation of state control through Colombia to deny sanctuary to terrorists and perpetrators of violence;
- Protection of the population through the increase of State presence and a corresponding reduction in violence;
- Destruction of the illegal drug trade in Colombia to eliminate the revenues which finance terrorism and generate corruption and crime;
- Maintenance of a deterrent military capability as a long-term guarantee of democratic sustainability;
- Transparent and efficient management of resources as a means to reform and improve the performance of the government.⁸

The results of this policy from August 2002 to August 2003, compared with the same period the year before, are as follows: a reduction of kidnappings by 23%, massacres by 41%, pipelines attacks by 31%, energy tower attacks by 36%, and reduced cultivation of illegal crops by 32%. Police presence returned to 158 municipalities that did not have it. The "Town Soldiers Program"⁹ has been established in 42% of municipalities, and military forces and police members increased by 19% in the initial phase.

In August 2003, President Uribe finished his first of four years in office and gained enormous popularity and the approval of most Colombians for these results. The population now shares in an atmosphere of optimism and the hope that with this kind of leadership the country has the best opportunity to achieve peace and a better future for the nation. Besides that, the Armed Forces perceive that they have now a clear strategy and adequate assets to carry out their strategic goals.

PLAN COLOMBIA

Since 1999, Plan Colombia has been at the core of the foreign policy between the United States and Colombia to deal with the complex crisis involving the lethal mix of drug trade and terrorism present in Colombia. Since the beginning, support of this plan has generated controversy in both countries, because some political leaders and human rights organizations have criticized the strategy, stating that the plan focuses primarily on a military solution.

In Colombia, guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug traffickers are fighting each other, trying to take control of the multi-billion dollar profits emanating from drug trafficking. A significant portion of this profitable “business” is funding the terrorist activities of guerrillas and paramilitaries. In this context, Plan Colombia was shaped as a long-term strategy to resolve the complex issues facing Colombia. Also, it provides the international community the opportunity to contribute to the solution of drug-related problems, in recognition of drugs as a transnational issue that requires shared responsibility to solve. Plan Colombia was designed in 1999 under two previous presidents – Andrés Pastrana in Bogotá, and Bill Clinton in Washington – and it is continuing today with determination by their successors, President Uribe and President George W. Bush.

The plan is not only a military effort, but also a social and political strategy to reestablish government presence to the isolated territories and integrate them with the rest of the country. It seeks to strengthen public institutions and the rule of law in areas severely affected by illegal organizations. At the same time, it brings about economic reform and sustains growth to an economy weakened by the crisis.

RESULTS OF PLAN COLOMBIA

According to the data established by the Colombian Government¹⁰, the following have been the results of Plan Colombia in each one of the four main goals defined in 2000:

Reduction of illegal Drugs and Dismantling of Terrorist Organizations. The cultivation of coca in Colombia has declined from 163,289 hectares in 2000 to 102,071 at the end of 2002, a reduction of 37%. An additional 74,779 hectares have been sprayed in 2003 to date. The goal of President Uribe’s program is to eliminate drugs from Colombia by the end of his term in 2006.¹¹

Since 2000, more than 320 tons of coca has been seized, and Colombia has 60% more combat-ready troops, including three U.S.-trained anti-narcotics battalions (3,000 troops). These troops have ample mobility and support for antinarcotics operations, with 72 helicopters supplied by the U.S. The support includes aircraft for aerial spraying operations, logistical services, upgraded radar systems, communications equipment, ammunition, spare parts and

training. These units have destroyed more than 1,000 coca laboratories and confiscated billions of gallons of solid and liquid chemicals used to process cocaine. Furthermore, Colombia's Armed Forces have seized more than 4,000 weapons from guerrillas and traffickers.¹²

As an alternative to coca, some 22,829 peasant families have agreed to give up growing coca and participate in alternative development programs; 24,549 hectares of legal crops have been supported with technical or agricultural assistance; 16,673 hectares of illegal crops have been manually eradicated; and 349 community and social infrastructure projects have been completed. These include roads, bridges, sewer systems, water treatment facilities, schools and health clinics.¹³

Strengthen Public Institutions and Increase State Presence. The Government of Colombia is committed to defeating drugs and terror within the framework of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. Colombia's Armed Forces have received more human rights training than any other military in Latin America. In the last six years, over 290,000 members of the Armed Forces have received such training, and the number of complaints has been reduced noticeably.

As part of the integral strategy, strengthening the judicial system gained importance as a way of combating impunity and illegality in order to promote peaceful, legitimate conflict resolution mechanisms. Over the last ten years, Colombia has been transforming its legal system into an accusatory system. In this regard, Plan Colombia resources have established 19 oral trial courtrooms, which has resulted in the training of 3,400 judges. Colombia's penal code was amended in order to establish penalties for crimes against human rights and international humanitarian law. Likewise, major improvements to prison administration, training of prison personnel and design of high security prisons have been implemented at prison facilities. A majority of serious offenders has been moved to new maximum-security prisons.¹⁴

Revitalize the Economy. The Colombian Government designed a program of structural economic reforms to restore the economy to sustainable levels of growth, low inflation, a stable currency, reduction of unemployment and stimulation of new investment. Key structural changes, including a constitutional reform to cut the percentage of federal budget sharing with local government, and tax increases and spending reductions have been implemented. In 2003, Colombian economic growth measured at 3.5%, significantly above annual growth rates of 1.4% in 2001 and 1.7% in 2002. The economic recovery helped reduce the national unemployment rate from 15.3% in May 2002 to 13.0% in May 2003. A total of 1.4 million new jobs have been created in the past year, a 9% increase in total employment. Colombia has used its own resources and credits from multilateral organizations to develop a social security net and

alternative development programs such as Families in Action, Youth in Action, and Jobs in Action, bringing assistance to more than 80,000 families, 49,000 youth, and creating over 3,000 projects to increase job opportunity.¹⁵

Advance the Colombian Peace Process. The Government of Colombia maintains an open door for peace talks with illegal armed groups, including the FARC, ELN and “Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia” (AUC). The Pastrana Administration attempted a negotiated resolution with the FARC. The Government sought to involve the international community, and the United Nations had strong participation in keeping the process alive throughout the previous administration. Unfortunately, the FARC failed to step up to the commitment and benevolence of the administration and used the talks to strengthen themselves while continuing to perpetrate acts of terror. Peace talks broke down in January 2002, when it became evident that the FARC had violated the confidence of the Government, the Colombian people, and that of the international community.

Despite attempts and well-intentioned gestures on behalf of the Uribe Administration to advance political negotiations, the FARC and ELN have not been receptive and talks have been slow to evolve. President Uribe has reiterated his intention to remain open to the possibility of dialogue with these groups. The government’s intention is to force illegal groups back to the negotiating table while military action depletes their size and effectiveness. A dialogue with the AUC has been established and to date 1,010 AUC members have been demobilized and reincorporated into society.¹⁶

COLOMBIAN MILITARY STRATEGY

The Colombian military forces during the last five years have conducted a program of restructuring and modernization with the goal of correcting failures in their organization. Action led to the creation of a program named “Military Forces Facing the 21st Century” that contained a general strategy of institutional readaptation and upgrading.¹⁷ Its philosophy considered the necessity of acquiring major military capacity and operational effectiveness against an aggressive and strong enemy. As a result of this plan, the military forces are stronger, with better training and equipment, and most importantly, with a new will to fight and achieve decisive victory. The Colombian military has taken the operational initiative and forced the guerrillas into a tactical retreat that has decreased significantly the current intensity of terrorist actions.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Commander of the Military Forces established several strategic tenets to direct restructuring and modernization. These tenets directed the ideological and structural conformation of the services with a proactive attitude to accomplish their constitutional mission. In doing so, actions must be framed by legal rules, open to innovation, in accordance with penal and disciplinary codes, coordinated with logistical support, and based on democratic values and military principles.¹⁸

The general objective of the plan was to prepare and strengthen military forces to facilitate solution of the conflict as an effective contribution to the peace. Its vision contemplates: "Modern military forces, professionals, technological and trained to operational success and for peace, backed in values, committed to national development of the nation and the challenges of the 21st century".¹⁹

The strategic objectives established in 2003 are:

- Strengthen the operational capacity of the military forces through the development of means and the consolidation of restructuring, with efficiency and productivity criteria;
- Eliminate the will to fight of narcoterrorist groups through overwhelming operational success and protection of the civilian population;
- Strengthen the legitimacy achieved as a transparent institution, efficient and respectful of human rights and customary international humanitarian law;
- Strengthen deterrence capability to maintain external security, sovereignty and national territorial integrity;
- Increase the level of personnel proficiency, both in waging war and other professional competencies.²⁰

LEGITIMACY, THE KEY TO GAINING POPULAR SUPPORT

Winning the hearts and influencing the minds of the people is imperative in asymmetric war scenarios. Integration with the population, civilian authorities, government agencies and media helps to establish and maintain the confidence required to operate with credibility. Even the strongest military force in the world can't celebrate victories if it doesn't act with legitimacy. Legitimacy results in recognition, reliability and a deep respect from others. These feelings are created through a firm attitude of doing the right thing by applying ethics in all military acts, according to military principles and values.

Respect for human rights and customary international humanitarian law gives the armed forces a great level of legitimacy. In Colombia, guerrillas conducted a successful campaign,

both national and international, orchestrated to unfairly accuse members of military institutions of violating human rights. With the support of sympathetic NGO's (non-government organizations), they fabricated hundreds of trials with false witnesses against military leaders. This campaign paid off and the image of the military was undermined; fortunately, with the military reform came a response that brought the truth to light. Now military institutions are strengthened in their legitimacy, truthfulness, and are able to win the war to facilitate the peace.²¹ Likewise, they are integrated into national development programs and into the well-being of the community. They are transparent, have a sense of identity, high morale and a high degree of ethical conduct.

Principles and values have been an important element of this process. The principles adhered to by the Colombian military forces are: 1) respect for the constitution and law; 2) ethics in all acts; 3) respect for others; 4) commitment to the nation; and 5) professional competence. The values intrinsic in the military are: 1) honesty, 2) valor, 3) loyalty, 4) honor, and 5) prudence.²² Those who neglect these principles and values are retired, punished under the disciplinary code, or otherwise brought to justice.

A NEW OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

The Colombian military forces designed a new vision of operations with emphasis on mobility and rapid reaction, improvement of the collection and processing of information, development of an integrated communications system, and integration of air power in support of ground operations. This new operational concept is based on the implementation of new doctrine, strengthening of training, improved planning efficiency, better capacity to react day and night, and an increased capability of responsive and agile air support.

Mobility, mass and flexibility are the keys to the Colombian military strategy. The Air Force and Army Aviation are now able to conduct night operations using night-vision equipment that have brought major improvement in the employment of air power, integrating operations effectively with the land forces. By moving troops quickly, anywhere and anytime, the Colombian military has neutralized the guerrillas' operational and tactical advantages. Mobility means deploying forces rapidly and safely by air, avoiding guerrillas that ambush the troops and mine the roads that military convoys must cross to reach combat areas.

The creation of the Rapid Deployment Force in December 1999 initiated this process. This unit, composed of three mobile brigades and a Special Forces brigade, consolidates a striking force of some 5,000 troops that can be deployed anywhere in Colombia. Despite the fact that

the force still has insufficient air transport resources, it has conducted the most successful operations to date throughout the country, becoming a source of pride for the population.

As a maxim of combat, before carrying out an operation, commanders in all levels must fulfill three basic elements: “accurate intelligence, excellent planning and correct leadership.” This simple phrase sums up the new culture exhibited by the Colombian military that has brought a chain of continuous successes on the battlefield.

MODERNIZATION OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence collection has improved with better training and equipment. The activation of the Joint Intelligence Center, the installation of air platforms with a signals intelligence (SIGINT) capability, the acquisition of recognition aircraft and the installation of radars have facilitated the integration of communication systems of air intelligence and land-based units.

A critical factor has been human intelligence (HUMINT) because the guerrillas exploited their familiarity with the terrain and with local networks of social control. This disadvantage has been diminished gradually by implementing the “Town Soldiers Program” (that complemented the return of the National Police to the municipalities that had no previous Police Presence) and the government plan “Red de Cooperantes” (cooperative network). The latter is a network of one million volunteers that support military authorities with information about guerrilla activities.

BETTER LOGISTICS STRUCTURE AND HUMAN TALENT

Logistics has been reinforced in combat service support (CSS) capabilities to meet the requirements of land, sea, river, and air units. Logistics is now able to respond to the requirements of the conflict, supporting the success of military operations with an appropriate upgrading of doctrine, new organizations, competent staffs, rapid procedures, and technological systems. Through the acquisition of new transportation equipment and the improvement of airport and harbor facilities in critical areas, logistics greatly enhanced its ability to support combat operations.

As the Public Force (the police and military) has increased since 2002, human talent has been one of the biggest improvements of the Colombian armed forces. Their professional component has increased by moving away from recruited high school graduates -that are exempted from combat duty- to professional soldiers, who are selected from among the draftees who must serve 18 months.²³ In 1998, just 22,000 enlisted were professional. In 2003, the amount of professional soldiers increased to 55,000. Draftees have been augmented as well, through “Plan Fortaleza” (strength plan) that recruited, yearly, 10,000 more draftees, increasing from 57,000 in 2000 to nearly 103,000 in 2004. Now the bulk of combat units are structured with

better-trained soldiers, who have higher combat experience and are more familiar with operational areas and the local communities.

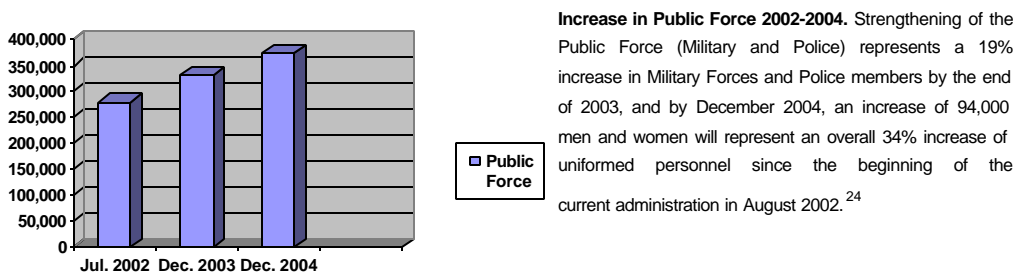


FIGURE 2. INCREASE IN PUBLIC FORCE 2002-2004

DEFINITION OF CENTERS OF GRAVITY

One of the biggest challenges in asymmetric warfare is to define friendly and enemy centers of gravity (COG). No doubt that legitimacy is the Colombian armed forces' friendly COG. It gives popular support, budget allocation, favorable political decisions, confidence and credibility.

When the enemy is an irregular force, its COG is unstable. In Colombia, initially illegal armed groups were the hub of enemy capacity. During more than two decades, thousands of insurgents were killed in combat, but the crisis worsened. Then, the sources of finance were attacked, but the enemy demonstrated ability to find new kinds of funding: foreign support, kidnapping, drug trafficking, extortion, etc. Now, territorial control has been defined as the nucleus of their power. Guerrillas and paramilitaries increased their zones of influence by force. Inside the areas under their control they obtained security, resources, popular support and co-governance with local authorities, extorted through terror. To communicate among zones of influence, they established strategic corridors, moving rapidly and easily to remote areas.

MILITARY CAMPAIGN: " THE PATRIOT PLAN"

The Army Commander, being responsible for the main effort of the war on terrorism, established as one of the strategic objectives the elimination of the will to fight of the narcoterrorist organizations through their military defeat and demobilization, thereby contributing to the security of the Colombian state. Strategic lines of action for this objective were defined: neutralizing armed and terrorist capacity; reducing funding, narcotrafficking, kidnapping and extortion; conducting overwhelming offensive actions to advance territorial control; gaining

domain and control of strategic zones; and securing the population and economical infrastructure of the country.²⁵

Taking this guidance, operations have been conducted with a strategic offensive attitude, articulated with integrated action that enhances combat power by synchronizing psychological operations and unity of effort with different government agencies, private institutions, and the community. Key goals are prosecuting long-term operations and cutting the strategic mobility corridors that narcoterrorists have used to achieve territorial control. This offensive has been complemented with mountain-trained battalions deployed on key terrain between mountains and the forward-deployed Town Soldiers in critical areas. One example of this concept is the operation carried out as part of the “Patriot Plan” in the second half of 2003 by units of the Rapid Deployment Force and the 5th Division around Bogotá, that destroyed six fronts of the FARC and resulted in the deaths of key FARC leaders.

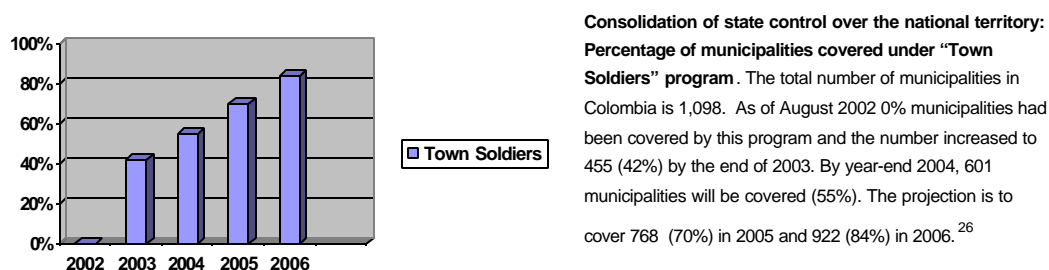


FIGURE 3. PERCENTAGE OF MUNICIPALITIES COVERED WITH "TOWN SOLDIERS"

The Colombian Armed Forces are highly professional, have a new administrative personnel system, led by sensible and caring commanders with an offensive attitude and a proactive mentality, with men and women motivated and convinced in their cause. The armed forces have fought tirelessly to help the Colombian people achieve peace. The national results of the initial phase of this campaign plan demonstrate clearly that its end state is been achieved. The effectiveness of the Colombian Democratic Security and Defense Policy²⁷ shows 2,878 members of FARC, ELN and AUC killed in combat, 11,972 captured, and 2,282 demobilized. If these forces numbered almost 33,000 in 2002, that means that more than 50 % are combat ineffective. The reduction of attacks on rural towns of 82 % and the decrease in illicit crops of 50 % are significant success stories.

CONCLUSION

While much improvement has been made, challenges still remain. As Colombia works to combat the threat of illegal drug trafficking and terrorism, it will require continued cooperation, not only from the United States, but also from the international community, to sustain and increase efforts in order to achieve real prosperity and lasting peace. The success of the new Colombian strategy depends on the continuity of the policy of the current administration. This is a long-term process that requires several presidential terms to consolidate a coherent security strategy. Implementation of a permanent state policy must supplant previous government policies applied temporarily in Colombia, which only attained transitory results.

Plan Colombia has brought more than four years of successful US-Colombia cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism. This success has several explanations, most notably the commitment by both the United States and Colombia to combine resources and share the burden to combat narco-terrorism. Both countries have invested considerable funds. To date, the U.S. has provided over US\$2.5 billion in military, economic and humanitarian assistance and the Colombian Government has spent nearly US\$4.9 billion of its own funds to support Plan Colombia.

The U.S-Colombia partnership against drugs and terror has gained considerable momentum, with positive outcomes in many areas.²⁸ In order to ensure these results are sustained, Plan Colombia programs must continue in the long term, incorporating new supporters inside the international community, especially the countries affected by consumption. As a transnational threat, drug trafficking and terrorism must be treated with priority in the international agenda to deter and defeat this dangerous threat. A sudden discontinuation of programs would be detrimental to the positive trends of reducing drugs and violence.

The next phases of Plan Colombia must focus on consolidating its successes in the fight against drugs and concentrate increasingly on dismantling the terrorist organizations that are behind the drug trade.

The National Security Strategy of the US states:

In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people.²⁹

This position marks a considerable shift in US policy that had previously not allowed using Plan Colombia resources against narcoterrorist groups, despite the fact that Colombian

authorities had demonstrated the link between terrorists and drug trafficking. If these resources are employed against terrorist groups, the Colombian Armed Forces will increase their combat power, and improve the operational results against terrorism and narco-trafficking.

The success in drug eradication policy has changed the dynamic of the conflict, and may also require a shift in resources to other areas. As the elimination of coca and poppy advances with greater results, it will be important to continue to improve the justice system to effectively bring the leaders of terrorist and drug organizations to justice. Social reconstruction in areas affected by the actions of terrorist groups will continue to be necessary, in order to ensure they do not revert to previous conditions.

Colombia's endeavor in conserving its natural environment is a major responsibility for the Colombian people, and for the rest of the world as well. As Colombia works to stop the destruction of its tropical forests -especially its portion of the Amazon Basin- for the production and manufacturing of illegal drugs, it will require extensive cooperation and support from the United States and the international community to preserve this important part of the Colombian patrimony.

The military is not the only solution to this crisis. These extraordinary operational results need to be complemented with political, social and economical programs to solve the deeply-rooted causes of the conflict. An integrated action that creates unity of effort is essential to involve all the elements of national power to definitely win this war.

The Clausewitzian concept of the "Remarkable Trinity" has been valid in the Colombian conflict. In consequence, emotion, chance and rational policy as related to the people, the army and the government, must be integrated in a well-balanced effort to thrive in war. The success achieved so far by the current Colombian strategy, in integrating the efforts of the people, the Armed Forces and the government against the narcoterrorist groups, has echoed in these words: "Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets".³⁰

It is too early to declare victory. The final solution is still far away, but each day the end is closer and the Colombian national strategy is proceeding in the right direction. Only with a sustained and determined effort will a permanent peace be achieved.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 89.

² La Violencia began on April 9, 1948 with the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, leader of liberal Party. In the decade that followed, armed followers of the Liberal and Conservative parties mobilized in the countryside in a bloody struggle; more than 150,000 people were killed.

³ For more information about Self-defenses groups see the monograph of David Spencer "Colombia's Paramilitaries: Criminals or Political Force", Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, December 2001.

⁴ Guerrillas use all these types of terrorist acts. Self-defenses groups have used mainly assassination, massacres and extortion (kidnapping has been directed against political leaders and guerrilla members).

⁵ Luz E. Nagle, *Plan Colombia: Reality of the Colombian Crisis and Implications for Hemispheric Security*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 2002, p.22.

⁶ Two initiatives can be mentioned: 1) The Plan LAZO (snare), implemented by the army in 1962, combined military operations, psychological warfare and use of armed forces to contribute to the economic development and social well-being of all Colombians. 2) "El Estatuto de Seguridad" (Security Statute) implemented in 1978; although government and military had mutual confidence, this strategy didn't gain enough support of the civil society, despite of positive military results.

⁷ "The Effectiveness of the Colombian Democratic Security and Defense Policy", Presidency of the Republic- Ministry of Defense, August 2002- August 2003, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 3-9.

⁹ Under this program, voluntary men and women are trained in their own towns with military and police capabilities, to restore state presence in zones affected by terrorists groups.

¹⁰ These results has been established by the Colombian Government through the Colombian Embassy in Washington D.C. and are considered as official information.

¹¹ Embassy of Colombia to the United States of America, Washington D.C., *Plan Colombia, Results to Date*, accessed via <http://www.colombiaemb.org/plancolombia/results.html>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ To date, two groups of AUC have demobilized and given their arms. In Medellin, 855 members of Bloque Cacique Nutibara and 155 members in the southwest region of Cauca department.

¹⁷ Comando General de las Fuerzas Militares, "Fuerzas Militares de Cara al Siglo XXI", Reestructuración Fuerzas Militares 1998-2001, Bogotá, January 2002.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 5-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7.

²⁰ General Jorge Enrique Mora, Comandante General Fuerzas Militares, "Direccinamiento Estratégico 2003, Políticas de Comando, Comando General Fuerzas Militares", p. 26-49, Bogotá, March 2003.

²¹ The latest poll according to the daily "El Tiempo", January 17, 2004, showed that among institutions Military Forces continue with the honor at the top of institutions with a favorable opinion of 80 %, followed by the Catholic Church with 75 %.

²² General Jorge Enrique Mora, Direccinamiento Estratégico 2003, p. 21.

²³ In 1999 Colombian armed forces had a professional component of 30.9 % of the force. The remaining 69.1 % were draftees who served 12 to 18 months. Of this number, 50.1 % were not high school graduates, and 19.0 % were *bachilleres*, or high school graduates. High school graduates are exempted from combat duty, according to Colombian law. In 2004 the professional component is almost 40 % and the high school graduates are around 2 %.

²⁴ "The effectiveness of the Colombian Democratic Security and Defense Policy, August 2002- November 2003", Presidency of the Republic-Ministry of Defense, Republic of Colombia, Bogotá, December 2003, p.9.

²⁵ General Carlos Alberto Ospina, Comandante del Ejército, "Políticas de Comando, Guía Operacional 2003", p. 23-33, Bogotá, April 2003.

²⁶ "The effectiveness of the Colombian Democratic Security and Defense Policy, August 2002- November 2003", p.9.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3-9

²⁸ At the Strategy level SOUTHCOM has been a key element of this success, because its Commanders and Staff have established a close relationship and coordination with the Colombian authorities, both civilian and military, creating strong ties of confidence and mutual respect.

²⁹ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, The White House, Washington, p. 10, September 2002.

³⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, p.89.

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